

Battle Honors of the Marine Amphibian IX. Inchon Masterstroke

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Although Russia entered the Pacific War only 6 days before Japan capitulated, it amassed considerable booty. It also gained entry into Korea where it established a communist state after receiving the surrender of Japanese forces above the 38th parallel. While the communists were consolidating their power, American officials were voicing lessened interest in Korea. Thus reassured, eight North Korean divisions crossed the border on 25 June 1950, seized Seoul, and drove southward, confident of victory.

The reaction was surprisingly swift. On 26 June the United Nations demanded the aggressor withdraw, the following day U.S. Navy and Air Force intervention was authorized, and by 30 June an Army regiment in Japan was embarking for Korea. Nonetheless, the initiative remained with the North Koreans. By the end of July the newly created U.S. Eighth Army, with surviving South Korean units, was precari-



Assault elements of the 1st Marines in LVT(3)C (with cover open) head for Blue Beach at Inchon late afternoon 15 September 1950.



The 5th Marines landing from boats storm seawall fronting Inchon late afternoon 15 September 1950.

ously holding a 100-mile perimeter centered on Pusan.

At home, Marine Corps fortunes were at low ebb. Airpower and nuclear weapons were preeminent, the Fleet Marine Force mustered just 27,000 men, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff held that "large-scale amphibious operations will never occur again." Yet on 7 August, 30 days after GEN MacArthur requested assistance, the 1st Provisional Brigade, commanded by BGen Edward A. Craig, had been activated, sailed 6,000 miles to Pusan, and been committed to battle.

By then, GEN MacArthur was pursuing his earlier proposal to land at Inchon, retake Seoul, and cut enemy communications to enable the Eighth Army to drive north. A major difficulty was that the approaches to Inchon are subject to 32-foot tides and 8-knot currents. Opposition to his proposal, heightened by prospects of a vigorous defense, was universal. But, MacArthur prevailed and asked for the 1st Marine Division to spearhead the landing.

Transfers and the mobilization of Reserves enabled the skeletonized division, then consisting of only 3,386 men, to reconstitute its units. Among these were the 1st Amtrac Battalion with newly covered LVT(3)Cs and the 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion, whose LVT(A)5s now had stabilized 75mm

See Amphibians On Parade, p. 75.



Low tide at Inchon. Tidal range exceeding 30 feet required scheduling main landings at Inchon in early morning and late afternoon.

howitzers. The task of organization, already daunting, approached the impossible as the 10 August embarkation date neared. That this compressed schedule was met was the first miracle; the second would be overcoming the extreme conditions at Inchon.

The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines began the action early 15 September by seizing Wolmi-do Island, which controls access to the port. The tide interrupted further landings until late afternoon, when the remainder of the 5th Marines stormed the seawall fronting the city, overwhelmed the defenders, and secured its initial objectives before midnight. Meanwhile, 3 miles to the south, 164 1st Battalion amtracs preceded by 18 Army LVT(A)5s landed the 1st Marines. There was some mixing of units and vicious firefights, but progress went as planned. By morn-

ing, there were 13,000 Marines ashore and the second miracle had been accomplished. MacArthur's master-stroke had succeeded.

The Marines took Kimpo airfield on the 19th, but the nine LVT(3)Cs that later tried to cross the Han River were thrown back. The next morning, the amtracs successfully blasted a passage for an infantry battalion. Meanwhile, the 7th Marines arrived and joined the division, which entered Seoul on the 27th just 3 months after it had been lost. That same day, the Eighth Army linked up with the 7th Infantry Division, recently landed at Inchon.

The Allied advance continued above the 38th parallel and by mid-November the 1st Marine Division was at the Chosin Reservoir. There, it was overwhelmed by Chinese forces but broke through to fight its legendary 78-mile "advance to the rear." Because of the massive Chinese intervention, 1950 ended with the belligerents back on the 38th parallel and the Marines fighting guerrillas in the south. In February 1951, the Marines were shifted to the central front, where the intensity of fighting lessened once negotiations began in June. Finally, the Division took over the western 35 miles of the demarcation line in March 1952 and was there when hostilities ended on 27 July 1953.

Throughout the Korean War the amphibians continued their "can-do" tradition of World War II. Once the assault at Inchon ended, the armored amphibians were primarily used for artillery support and patrol of waterways and harbors. The cargo amphibians, which served as armored personnel carriers and supply vehicles, were notably effective for assault river crossings and ferry services. They also performed well manning fixed defenses. This diversity of tasks reflects the prolonged engagement of the Marines in land warfare. The Korean experience confirmed the utility of amphibians and provided a useful prelude to Vietnam.



It is December 1950 and Marine units leave the Chosin Reservoir area and advance toward Hungnam for reembarkation and redeployment southward. The operation, carried out in bitterly cold weather, was contested by seven Chinese divisions.

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